

**07/12/21 Monday**

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

'Bay of Tweets': Twitter Permits Anti-Cuba Bot Army Despite 'Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior' Rules  
by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

The United Nations has voted every year since 1992 to condemn the US 60-year embargo of Cuba, which is responsible for shortages in fuel, medicine, and essential parts on the island that have affected the life of every one of its 11.5 million people. Despite the suffering, the US maintains "sanctions are tools for democracy."

Even before protests broke out in Cuba on Sunday, a coordinated online campaign to spread anti-Cuban messages had begun circulating on Twitter. Not only does the social media giant appear to be uninterested in stopping it, but it has a history of arbitrarily shutting down Cuban government and media accounts as well.

As reports of [protests in Cuba](#) over brownouts and shortages of medical supplies spread on Sunday, debate on social media raged about the meaning of the demonstrations. Supporters of the Cuban government soon found themselves inundated with replies by accounts with zero followers and that followed zero accounts and had been created within the last few months or even days.

These accounts liked each others' posts, replied and posted en masse, using similar messages. Some of them even had identical names, like "john appleseed," which appeared at least twice. Several large accounts reported being quickly inundated, but even users with "small" accounts and few followers anecdotally noted their posts about Cuba were being replied to by the mystery posters almost instantly.

The accounts have also retweeted and amplified posts critical of Cuba and its leaders, including [a July 9 tweet](#) by former adult film star Mia Khalifa that tagged Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel and said "dude you f\*cking suck" and misinformation posts such as a [video of Buenos Aires, Argentina](#), that was passed off as "Cuba right now."

**Bot Armies Prepare Ground for Protests**

However, the phenomenon didn't simply start on Sunday: it began building several days earlier with the hashtag #SOSCuba, following the formula used for many other regime change programs directed by the United States, including the 2019 coup d'etat against Bolivian President Evo Morales and attempted coup of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro.

News portal Dominio Cuba noted on July 9 that a huge number of what it called "bots" were mass-posting identical or nearly identical messages just seconds after one another.

Another account, a well-known pro-Cuban account by the name of Cuban nationalist hero Jose Marti, also made a record of mass harassment on Saturday by the bots.

"Yesterday, I had to lock my account because it was inundated with bot spam. I'm still receiving it many hours later," he posted early Sunday, showing a video of a long list of dozens of spam replies to a post that spoke of the CIA's history of "provocation led by paid actors that's been

boosted by imperialist media that channels real grievances that Cubans have (caused by the US blockade) into photogenic protests for the West.”

Marti later quipped that the #SOSCuba Twitter operation would soon be known as the [“Bay of Tweets”](#) because, like the US’ failed 1961 coup by Cuban counter-revolutionaries known as the Bay of Pigs, it would be “defeated in three days with a revolution better secured than ever.”

#### Twitter’s Lost Enthusiasm for Crackdowns

These types of coordinated campaigns directed at nations targeted by the US for regime change are far from new: [The Grayzone reported](#) last year on how Facebook took down a US-based operation run by “strategic communications” firm CLS Strategies in support of the Venezuelan and Bolivian coup efforts in 2019.

However, it’s far more common for the shoe to be on the other foot, as Twitter, Facebook, and Google have made a habit of [taking down accounts](#) that post or repost stories in support of or that even just cast in a favorable light various governments the US has provoked crises in, [including China](#), Russia, Iran, Venezuela, and Cuba.

Sometimes these takedowns are justified by what Twitter claims is [“coordinated inauthentic behavior.”](#) but other times the takedowns are massive and done without explanation. That’s what happened on September 11, 2019, just minutes before Diaz-Canel was due to address the Cuban people about new measures intended to help the country survive a fuel shortage created by the tightening US embargo.

[As Sputnik reported](#), Twitter silenced dozens of prominent accounts, including news outlets like Mesa Redonda, CubaDebate, and the Communist Party of Cuba’s official paper, Granma, as well as many of the outlets’ reporters; some of the accounts had hundreds of thousands of followers. Twitter also suspended the accounts of several government ministries and prominent politicians, including then-CPC First Secretary Raul Castro and National Center for Sex Education (CENESEX) director Mariela Castro Espin.

#### Havana Points to ‘Communicational Operation’ in Protests

After the protests broke out on Sunday, Cuban government officials reached out to the communities in an attempt to address their concerns, which included intermittent electricity supply due to power being rerouted to city hospitals, which are being flooded with patients amid a spike in COVID-19 cases. However, other demonstrators were more violent, [fighting with police](#) and flipping over police cars.

In all cases, international media amplified the protests and cast them as “a major new challenge to an authoritarian government,” as [the Washington Post](#) put it, echoing the line taken by US President Joe Biden and members of his administration.

“We stand with the Cuban people and their clarion call for freedom and relief from the tragic grip of the pandemic and from the decades of repression and economic suffering to which they have been subjected by Cuba’s authoritarian regime,” [Biden said on Monday](#).

His press secretary, Jen Psaki, told reporters Monday that there was “every indication” that the weekend protests in Cuba were “spontaneous” and “inspired by the harsh realities of daily life,” and not by shortages created by a 60-year-long embargo by the United States designed to strangle the Cuban economy. When the COVID-19 pandemic began, the Trump administration [increased pressure](#) on Cuba even further than it already had, and the Biden administration has followed the same path, including keeping Cuba on the list of state sponsors of terrorism, to which it was arbitrarily added just days before Donald Trump left office.



Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno [Rodriguez Parrilla rejected](#) the US characterization of the protests, saying Monday they “were not a social uprising, but disorder, disturbances caused by a communicational operation that had been prepared for some time and to which millions of dollars had been committed.”

Indeed, in 2014, the [Associated Press revealed](#) that the US Agency for International Development (USAID) had created an alternative to Twitter that was intended to sow dissent on the island.

Called ZunZuneo, after the Cuban name for a hummingbird’s tweet, the program “evaded Cuba’s digital restrictions by creating a text-messaging service that could be used to organize political demonstrations. It drew tens of thousands of subscribers who were unaware it was backed by Washington, which went to great lengths to conceal its involvement,” the AP reported at the time.

More recently, the [House appropriations bill](#) for the Department of State’s budget for fiscal year 2022 that was introduced last week requests tens of millions of dollars for influence operations directed at Cuba. Some of the requests include \$9.7 million for “broadcasting capital improvements” by the United States Agency for Global Media, which manages US state-run propaganda outlets like Voice of America and Radio y Television Marti, the latter of which is based in Miami, Florida, and broadcasts toward Cuba.

The bill also says that no less than \$5 million and no more than \$20 million from the Economic Support Fund must go toward supporting “free enterprise and private business organizations” and “people-to-people educational and cultural activities.”

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

Video: Six Dead in South Africa as Army Moves to Suppress Pro-Zuma Protests  
by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

Pretoria has begun deploying troops on the streets of several South African cities on the fourth day of massive protests in which at least six people have been killed. While sparked by the detention of former President Jacob Zuma, the demonstrations are also being driven by massive unemployment and economic malaise caused by COVID-19 lockdowns.

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa said in a national address on Monday evening that the protests would soon lead to shortages in food and medicine if they didn’t stop, and had already interrupted the country’s vaccination program at a time the government is attempting to ramp up the pace of shots.

Earlier on Monday, the South African military announced it would begin putting troops on the streets of several major cities, including the legislative capital of Johannesburg and the KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) cities of Pietermaritzburg and Durban, after mass protests brought fires, looting, and several deaths from gunshot wounds.

“The South African National Defence Force has commenced with pre-deployment processes and procedures in line with a request for assistance received... to assist law enforcement agencies deployed in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal provinces respectively to quell the unrest

that has gripped both Provinces in the last few days," the military said in a statement [obtained by AFP](#).

The size and duration of the deployment will be determined "according to the assessment of the situation on the ground by the police," the statement adds, noting their missions will be "to provide security and a safe working environment for law enforcement agencies" to do their job. However, [Reuters reported that](#) one of its field reporters had already spotted troops in Pietermaritzburg.

Video from the town on Monday morning showed flames billowing from a shopping mall, and there were widespread reports of looting, fires, and police shooting rifles and tear gas at protesters.

WARNING! The following video is disturbing and may offend sensibilities

Other videos on social media showed at least two bodies in a ditch alongside the road, although it wasn't clear where the video had been filmed.

In Phoenix, an Indian town between Durban and Pietermaritzburg, residents took up arms and set up roadblocks, shooting several looters dead. A reporter with South African news outlet [eNCA reported](#) that "racial discrimination is creeping into the action taken by some residents to 'protect' themselves," although it was unclear who was targeting who.

According to Reuters, at least 219 people have been arrested since the protests broke out on Friday. While they were primarily focused in the eastern province of KwaZulu-Natal, where Zuma is from, protests and looting were also reported in Soweto on the outskirts of Johannesburg, where Reuters saw police shooting at looters with rubber bullets.

Zuma was taken into custody on Wednesday after handing himself over to serve a [15-month jail sentence](#) for contempt of court. The 79-year-old former president had been called to testify in a state commission probe of alleged corruption during his 2009-18 term, which he refused to do. On Friday, the Pietermaritzburg High Court [rejected his application](#) to overturn the decision, and protests quickly grew, fueled by his supporters who had pledged violence if he were taken into custody.

Saturday morning began with a line of trucks being stopped outside Howick, northwest of Pietermaritzburg, and 20 of them being set on fire.

However, while Zuma's arrest might have sent people into the streets, the widespread looting points to a much deeper problem: widespread economic malaise has plagued the country through the pandemic, and only grown worse with the latest round of lockdowns.

According to [government statistics](#), in the first quarter of 2021, the unemployment rate in South Africa was 32.6%, but unemployment among 15-34-year-olds was 46.3%. KZN has [fared the second-worst](#) among South Africa's nine provinces, losing 83,000 jobs in that time. The economic standstill has sent South Africans hunting for odd jobs, including [fueling a rush](#) on what turned out to be false diamonds in KwaHlathi, a town in northern KZN.

However, an exploding third wave of COVID-19 has sent the country into new lockdowns, and a [ban on the sale](#) of alcohol - intended to reduce the pressure on hospitals by limiting trauma patients - has only stirred anger further; liquor stores are among the primary targets of looters, according to reports.

The country has [suffered 40% of Africa's](#) COVID-19 deaths, and less than 5% of the population has been immunized.



However, as protests grew, the left-wing Economic Freedom Fighters party complained of a “media blackout” as South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) provided “close to no coverage” of the demonstrations, they said.

“The SABC has a mandate as a public broadcaster to ensure it reports all news without bias and comprehensively, to ensure that the nation is informed and can draw its own conclusions on matters that confront society,” [the EFF statement](#) on Saturday reads.

“The SABC undermines its mandate when it conducts its coverage selectively and raises suspicion that it is assuming a posture similar to captured news entities such as the racist eNCA,” it adds. “The national broadcaster is not an arm of the ruling party and it must never be turned into a public relations entity of the ruling party and its factions. The protests in KwaZulu Natal are of national interest and the SABC must cover them accordingly.”

Ramaphosa rose to power on a pledge to tackle corruption in the African National Congress, and after replacing Zuma as party chief in 2017, the ANC pulled its support in parliament from Zuma and he was forced to resign, with Ramaphosa replacing him as president as well.

However, Ramaphosa, a banker, has met his own accusations of graft and corruption, as well. Zuma’s arrest is widely seen as further widening the split in the ANC, as the two factions vie to claim the legacy of the movement that ended Apartheid white minority rule in 1994.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

Macron Reveals Only Half of 5,000-Strong Barkhane Force Leaving Africa, Despite Claimed End of Ops

by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

Last month, French President Emmanuel Macron revealed that the eight-year-long Operation Barkhane would soon come to an end. However, the highly unpopular war won’t truly be over: he revealed on Friday that only half of the 5,100 soldiers will be coming home as the rest rebase southward.

France’s “forever war” in West Africa won’t be ending anytime soon, judging by recent comments from the French head of state.

“We will remain committed, but to remain committed is also to adapt,” [Macron told reporters](#) on Friday after a summit with leaders of the G5 Sahel nations, which include the former French colonies of Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Chad.

He revealed that by the beginning of next year, 2,000 French troops will have left Africa and the remaining 2,500-3,000 soldiers will be shifted southward. The French bases in Kidel, Tessalit and Timbuktu will be closed amid the move.

“This reconfiguration will begin in the coming weeks. In line with the shift in threat to the south, it will mean a reduction in our military footprint primarily in the north,” Macron said. “There will also [be] a dimension of reassurance ... to remain permanently ready to intervene rapidly in support of partner forces,” he added, referring to air support from Niger and Chad.

That number is significantly larger than the [“several hundred forces”](#) he said on June 10 would remain behind as part of the Takuba Task Force, fighting Islamist militias near where Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso meet.

In mid-June, Macron announced the [end of Barkhane](#) after what he called a “coup within a coup” occurred in Mali, one of the primary battlefields of the War on Terror-style campaign. Malian Col. Assimi Goita, the mastermind behind the August 2020 coup that led to the creation of a tenuous interim government between military and civilian leaders, [arrested and removed](#) from office the president and prime minister, and subsequently promoted himself to head of state after they attempted to reduce the military’s influence over the government. In response, Macron suspended French cooperation with the Malian Army, then ended the entire Barkhane operation outright.

The sudden end came amid a pullout of French troops from the [Central African Republic](#), another former French colony. As [Sputnik has reported](#), the wars are highly unpopular both in France and the countries where they are deployed, and with Macron also beginning his re-election campaign last month, it’s clear he’s concerned [about public opinion](#).

“France doesn’t have the vocation or the will to stay eternally in the Sahel,” Macron said Friday. “We are there because [we] were asked to be.”

Barkhane began as Operation Serval, a deployment to Mali in early 2013 to halt the rapid expansion of Tuareg rebels who had capitalized on the chaos created by [yet another coup](#), ironically carried out by military officers upset with the government’s lackadaisical approach to the Tuareg uprising.

However, late last month, the United Nations [extended its MINUSMA](#) peacekeeping mission in Mali, maintaining its maximum deployment of 13,289 military personnel and 1,920 police, but saying it was imperative the government keep to its promised schedule for February 2022 elections.

It’s unclear what has caused the French troop numbers to increase, since Mali is no longer participating and Nigerien President Mohamed Bazoum made clear his dissatisfaction with the French deployment, but didn’t totally fault European troops for the lack of a victory.

“We are not seeing results because at the moment, it is mostly our armies that have not been up to the task,” Bazoum said. “Five thousand French troops in Mali will not fix the problems in Niger, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast or elsewhere. That is clear, and we must understand that.”

However, in the days prior to the summit, [Macron hosted Chad’s](#) de facto interim president, Mahamat Idriss Deby Itno, in Paris. With Barkhane’s headquarters in the capital of N’Djamena, Chad under Deby Itno’s father, Idris Deby, was a [close French military](#) partner in the region for three decades, and Deby Itno clearly hoped to continue that relationship amid his “visit of friendship and work.”

At the meeting, Macron pledged to increase aid to Deby Itno’s military junta, provided it, too, continues on a path to hold new elections next year. He also hailed Chad’s commitment to continuing the fight begun under Operation Barkhane and continuing to cooperate with French forces and the forces of other Sahel states, even as Chad continues its fight against the rebel group Front for Alternation and Concord in Chad (FACT), who Idris Deby was killed fighting in April.



**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

Sen. Rand Paul Calls for NSA Probe on Alleged Government Surveillance of Tucker Carlson by [Evan Craighead](#)

Tucker Carlson, the 52-year-old host of Fox News' "Tucker Carlson Tonight," alleged during a late June broadcast that the US National Security Agency (NSA) had been conducting surveillance on his opinion show's electronic communications in an effort to get the program canceled. The NSA later claimed, "Carlson has never been an intelligence target."

Sen. Rand Paul (R-KY) confirmed on Monday that he issued a letter to NSA Director Gen. Paul Nakasone last week, demanding that he investigate Carlson's allegations that the US Department of Defense intelligence agency "alleged spying and unmasking" of the Fox News opinion show host, "as well as any leaks of his private emails from the NSA to other reporters."

"Mr. Carlson is a journalist, who currently hosts the popular news program Tucker Carlson Tonight, and as such he is to be afforded the freedom of the press protections guaranteed by the First Amendment to the United States Constitution," Paul said in a quoted statement.

"As you are undoubtedly aware, Mr. Carlson recently alleged on his television show that the NSA not only read his private emails relating to his attempt to interview Russian President Vladimir Putin, but also that the NSA unmasked his identity and leaked his private emails, which identified him by name, to others in the press."

[Carlson claimed that a "whistleblower"](#) informed him of the government surveillance, as well as the unmasking of his identity to those within US media. The alleged leaks came as part of the Biden administration's attempt to discredit the opinion show host and frame him as a "disloyal American" or "Russian operative," Carlson added.

Paul, who is a frequent guest on "Tucker Carlson Tonight," went on to assert that he is "open-minded enough" to believe the NSA did not spy on Carlson, but "a long train of abuses conducted by the NSA evinces a consistent design to evade the law and violate the constitutionally-protected liberties of the people."

The US senator from Kentucky emphasized that, due to these abuses, the NSA will have to do more than [issue a denial via social media](#), which the agency did on June 29.

While the NSA is supposedly tasked with dealing with "foreign threats," and not those relating to private US citizens, former NSA agent-turned-whistleblower Edward Snowden famously exposed information relating to the US Department of Defense intelligence agency's PRISM program - the codename given to the program which allows the government to privately flout US laws and collect information on private US citizens via hidden warrants.

While Carlson's allegations have been picked up by Paul, House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) and [former US President Donald Trump](#), who has also alleged to be a victim of government surveillance, former NSA Director Gen. Michael Hayden appeared to be against an investigation into the government surveillance allegations raised by Carlson.

"You're an a\*\*hole," tweeted Hayden, who served as director of the NSA under the administrations of former Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

Dozens of Texas Dems Traveling to Washington, DC, in Effort to Break Quorum for Voting Reform Bill  
by [Evan Craighead](#)

In a similar move back in May, Texas Democrats triggered the end of a state legislative session and blocked voting for a GOP-backed voting reform bill when they walked out of the chamber. Governor Greg Abbott (R) responded to the move by vetoing a section of the state budget bill, effectively slashing the budgets of thousands, including lawmakers.

Dozens of Democrats in the Texas House of Representatives boarded two chartered flights bound for Washington, DC, on Monday in an effort to prevent their legislative chamber from reaching quorum to vote on a number of items, including a GOP-backed bill with voting restrictions.

While an official headcount has not been held at the time of this article's publication, at least 51 of the 67 state representatives are taking the trip, according to the [Texas Tribune](#). Exactly 51 lawmakers would have to be absent from the chamber in order to break the quorum.

"My Democratic colleagues and I are leaving the state to break quorum and kill the Texas voter suppression bill," tweeted Democratic Texas Rep. James Talarico. "We're flying to DC to demand Congress pass the For The People Act and save our democracy."

The Texas voting reform legislation - Senate Bill 1 and House Bill 3 - come as Texas Republicans' latest effort to ban 'drive-thru voting' and enhance restrictions on mail-in voting and other initiatives enacted across the state during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in the US. The legislation also calls for new ID requirements for mail-in voting, added protections for partisan poll workers and the ban of 24-hour voting locations, which were set up to assist those who are working during the usual hours of polling.

Responding to the lawmakers' departure, Gov. Abbott, a Republican, said that Democrats were inflicting "harm on the very Texans who elected them to serve."

He also asserted that while they traveled in their "cushy private planes," Texans in their respective districts were being left without the passage of legislation that could help them, "such as property tax relief and funding for children in the state's foster care system."

House Speaker Dade Phelan (R), who leads the chamber, declared in a statement that the chamber "will use every available resource under the Texas Constitution and the unanimously-passed House rules to secure a quorum to meaningfully debate and consider." US Vice President Kamala Harris, a Democrat, said on Monday that she admires the "extraordinary courage and commitment" of the Texas Democrats abandoning their duties in protest of the reform bill.

"I applaud their standing for the rights of all Americans and all Texans to express their voice through their vote unencumbered," Harris remarked while speaking at a voting rights meeting in Detroit, Michigan, [according to CBS News' Tim Perry](#).

"They are leaders who are marching in the path that so many others before did," she added. "When they fought and many died for our right to vote."



A number of the items included in the proposed legislation were taken from Senate Bill 7, the original bill that was left behind after Texas Democrats broke quorum in May. At the time, a number of Democratic Texas lawmakers declared that many elements of SB 7 did not align with the democratic principles of the US.

"A lot of us view these efforts, the 'election integrity' efforts, as an attack on our democracy," Democratic Texas Rep. Jon Rosenthal told ABC13. "That, to me, is not just an attack on democracy. If we have that going on, that's the end of democracy."

Under the proposed legislation, it would be easier for one's vote to be dismissed over voter fraud suspicions.

Abbott slammed the Democrats' walkout back in May, and moved to punish thousands of government-affiliated staffers by vetoing Article 10 of the budget passed by the legislature.

"Funding should not be provided for those who quit their job early, leaving their state with unfinished business and exposing taxpayers to higher costs for an additional legislative session," the Texas governor said in a statement. "I therefore object to and disapprove of these appropriations."

However, it is unlikely that the state lawmakers will be missing their funds that much when the budget launches on September 1, as lawmakers only receive \$600 per month via Article 10. Instead, a number of individuals who work out of the Capitol will be impacted, such as legislative staffers, support services and other individuals who were not elected, and do not make state laws.

The veto was panned by a number of individuals who questioned the constitutionality of his veto. Even fellow Republicans took issue with the move.

"My concern is how it impacts staff, especially those who live here in Austin, which is not an inexpensive place to live and raise your family and children," House Speaker Phelan, who was a former legislative staffer himself, told the Texas Tribune. "And the agencies it impacts — Sunset, Legislative Reference Library, Lege Council — I'm just concerned how it impacts them because they weren't the ones who decided that we were gonna break quorum, it wasn't their decision, right?"

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

'He Preyed on Me': Former Nickelodeon Star Drake Bell Avoids Jails Time in Child Endangerment Case  
by [Evan Craighead](#)

Last month, Drake Bell, full name Jared Drake Bell, pleaded guilty to attempted endangerment of a child - a fourth-degree felony - and the dissemination of matter harmful to juveniles - a first-degree misdemeanor. Prosecutors said that Bell, who was on tour at the time of the incident, created a risk of harm by letting a minor attend his concert.

On Monday, Judge Timothy McCormick of Ohio's Cuyahoga County Common Pleas Court sentenced Bell, to two years of probation and 200 hours of community service as part of a plea deal over child endangerment charges relating to an incident in December 2017.

During Bell's sentencing, McCormick declared that the 35-year-old "did take advantage" of the then-15-year-old victim.

"You were able to gain access to this child and you were able to gain the trust of the child," the judge asserted, [as reported by People](#). "So it's a two-edged sword, your position. I hope you truly are remorseful, I don't know [if you are]."

"Today I accept this plea because my conduct was wrong. I'm sorry that the victim was harmed in any way — that was obviously not my intention," the 35-year-old said in a statement. "I have taken this matter very, very seriously, and again I just want to apologize to her and anyone else who may have been affected by my actions."

Ian Friedman, Bell's attorney, also emphasized via statement that, despite the charges his client pleaded guilty to, "sexual registration was not imposed." Instead of denying the victim's claims, Friedman said that her allegations lacked "supporting evidence."

However, testimony provided by the victim, who is now 19 years old, told a darker story of Bell, whom she said is the "epitome of evil."

"He was calculating. He preyed on me and sexually abused me," she told the court in a pre-written statement via Zoom, noting that he sent her pictures of his genitalia. "He is a monster and a danger to children."

She also labeled the 35-year-old a "coward" for opting to virtually attend court, rather than appearing in person.

"Jared Drake Bell is a pedophile and that is his legacy," she asserted.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

Israeli Millionaire Accused of Undermining Israel's Security After Allegedly Passing Intel to Iran by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

The businessman at the center of the Shin Bet's latest investigation once served as a Knesset candidate for the since-defunct Telem Party after he was named as a contender by former Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon in 2019. However, he was never officially registered. Yaqoub Abu al-Qia'an, an Israeli construction magnate who had a brief stint as a Knesset candidate for the state's Telem Party, was charged on Monday with relaying information to Iranian intelligence officials that detailed certain aspects of the Israeli state.

The Israeli millionaire, who was indicted at the Southern District Court in Beersheba, was specifically charged with contact with a foreign agent and disclosing information to an enemy of the state.

The Shin Bet security service detailed after a gag order on the case was partially lifted that Abu al-Qia'an allegedly kept in contact with Haidar al-Mashhadani, a Lebanese-Iraqi man who acted as a go-between for Iranian intelligence authorities.

As for the information that was handed over to Iranian contacts, reports have indicated it was not classified information. In fact, it's believed that Abu al-Qia'an's intel was publicly available information.



Citing Channel 12, the Times of Israel [reported](#) that the so-called intelligence that was forked over was of “no value,” and that it detailed the movements of Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz - information that was already made available to the public.

It's presently unclear how long Abu al-Qia'an maintained his contact with al-Mashhadani, how frequent the conversations were held between Abu al-Qia'an and al-Mashhadani, as well as the identities of Iranian officials who received the updates.

Although nothing ever materialized, it has also been detailed that Abu al-Qia'an inquired about having covert, in-person meetings with Iranian operatives. Abu al-Qia'an's efforts were also reportedly tied to the millionaire's interest in expanding his own business opportunities.

According to [YNet News](#), Abu al-Qia'an rejected the accusations during Monday's court proceedings, vowing that he did not commit any national security offenses. He later opted to fully withdraw his past confession after stating parts of his statement were fabricated.

However, Abu al-Qia'an did admit to having knowingly held business ties with a foreign agent. Abu al-Qia'an was initially arrested on June 10, with Israeli officials having kept him in custody for weeks without filing charges or granting the businessman contact with his legal representatives. Reports of his case only recently surfaced after the Ashkelon District Court partially raised a gag order on the developments.

The millionaire's case comes months after reports [detailed](#) that an Israeli service member was found dead in his jail cell after having been detained for reportedly harming Israeli national security. Little is known about the case, as it too was slapped with a gag order.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

'Blatant Hypocrisy': Schumer Accuses NRA of Bankruptcy Fraud, Calls for DoJ Investigation by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

The US' National Rifle Association (NRA) filed for a Chapter 11 bankruptcy judgement in January as part of a larger effort to relocate to the more gun-friendly state of Texas. The announcement was made as the gun advocacy group had come under investigation by the office of New York Attorney General Letitia James over allegations of fraud and abuse. US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) has called for the US Department of Justice to launch an investigation into the NRA's bankruptcy filing, accusing the gun-rights group of abusing the system.

The New York lawmaker raised his concerns during a Sunday news conference in which he highlighted several financing actions taken by the NRA that proved the group was well-funded and not privy to protections afforded under a bankruptcy filing.

Among the points voiced by Schumer, the majority leader highlighted that after the NRA filed for bankruptcy, the group went on to fund advertising initiatives against proposed gun proposals, at one point dishing out \$2 million in April for ads against universal background checks.

The agency has also rolled out ads opposing the nomination of [David Chipman](#) to head the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF). Chipman, who worked for the ATF for over 20 years, has been a vocal advocate for tougher gun laws.

"They recently told the judicial branch of government that they are bankrupt after the lawsuit by Tish James, and at the same time they're saying they're bankrupt, they're spending millions of dollars on ads to stop universal background checks," Schumer said, referring to the New York attorney general. "What blatant hypocrisy."

"That demands an investigation by the Justice Department."

He later underscored to reporters that "the bottom line is the NRA shot itself in the foot when they declared bankruptcy and still have millions of dollars."

In a [statement](#) to The Hill, Andrew Arulanandam, managing director of NRA Public Affairs, slammed Schumer's calls for an investigation and deemed the lawmaker's remarks a "weak, tyrannical threat."

"The NRA has said repeatedly in public forums that we are financially stronger than ever. We have also said that we will continue to wage, and win, the public debate over 'gun control,'" the official said. "It is regrettable that Sen. Schumer chose to ignore those salient facts in his press conference Sunday."

NRA CEO Wayne LaPierre [explained](#) in mid-January that the filing and push to relocate to the Lone Star State was rooted in efforts to "seek protection from New York officials who illegally abused and weaponized the powers they wield against the NRA and its members."

The January announcement came after the New York attorney general revealed her office would be filing a lawsuit to dissolve the pro-gun group, after evidence suggested NRA executives were routinely misusing charitable funds for personal gain.

It's worth noting that bankruptcy filings are also known for implementing a freeze on the majority of pending lawsuits filed against an individual or company.

However, in the months that followed the bankruptcy filing, a US judge dismissed the case after [concluding](#) that the agency "did not file the bankruptcy petition in good faith," and was solely using the system as a way to "address a regulatory enforcement problem, not a financial one."

The US Justice Department has yet to comment on whether it will be launching a probe.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

Sealed Copy of 'Super Mario 64' Video Game Nets Record-Breaking \$1.56 Million at Auction

Fans all over the world love playing the exploits of the famous cartoon plumber Mario as he battles foes all across the Mushroom Kingdom in his eponymous Nintendo video game series. Since his first appearance in 1981's "Donkey Kong," Mario and his friends have appeared in more than 200 different video game titles.

An ultra-rare copy of the "Super Mario 64" video game, first released in 1996 for the Nintendo 64 console, was sold at [auction](#) on Sunday and yielded a whopping \$1.56 million, marking the largest amount ever paid for an individual copy of a video game.

The copy of the game, which had never been opened before, was auctioned through Heritage Auctions, which claims to be "the world's largest collectibles auctioneer" and is based in Dallas, Texas.



"Super Mario 64" was the best-selling game ever for the Nintendo 64 console due to its easy playability and innovative gameplay. It was also the Mario franchise's first foray into 3D, which most subsequent Mario games have followed ever since.

Considered a milestone in the "platform game" genre, characterized as being able to use abilities such as running, jumping and climbing to navigate the game's environment, as well as usually being more family-friendly, "Super Mario 64" is widely regarded to be one of the best and most influential video games ever made.

"Well - we're a bit speechless on this one. What can we even say that would do this copy the justice it deserves? The cultural significance of this title and its importance to the history of video games is paramount, and the condition of this copy is just so breathtaking that we're really at a loss here," a description of the item on Heritage Auctions' website read.

"If you have had your heart set on obtaining the highest graded copy of the single best-selling video game on the Nintendo 64 - the first 3D adventure of Nintendo's mascot, Mario - we only have one piece of advice: this is not an opportunity to waste."

Sixteen people bid on the game over the course of the three-day auction, according to [The Hill](#). Heritage Auctions has indicated that there are "fewer than five" copies in as good condition as the one just sold at auction.

It was graded a 9.8, the second-highest rating for overall quality, and an "A++," the highest rating for seal quality, by the Colorado-based video game-grading company [WataGames](#), which evaluated the item. According to the [BBC](#), this means "it is both in near-perfect condition and its seal is intact and 'like new.'"

The sale beats a record that was only set on [Friday](#) by a rare, unopened copy of Nintendo's "The Legend of Zelda" game from 1987 that ultimately sold for \$870,000 in another auction conducted by Heritage Auctions.

7/13/2021 9:45:37 AM -04:00

IMF Says Holds Productive Meetings With Argentine Authorities to Advance Support Program (Updates with additional info in paras 3-6)

WASHINGTON, July 13 (Sputnik) - The International Monetary Fund (IMF) said on Tuesday that its staff held productive discussions with the Argentine authorities on moving forward the work towards the fund-supported program.

"The Argentine authorities and IMF staff held productive meetings to further advance the technical work towards an IMF-supported program," the statement said. "The IMF team and the Argentine authorities will continue working together in the period ahead with a view to further deepening their understandings in these key areas. Our goal is to support Argentina as it durably addresses its economic and balance of payment challenges."

The IMF noted that the teams addressed the global environment, the COVID-19 pandemic and their implications for "Argentina's macroeconomic framework. Discussions focused on policies to strengthen the recovery, economic stability, and job creation," the statement said.

"In particular, progress was made in identifying policy options to develop the domestic capital market, mobilize domestic revenue, and strengthen Argentina's external resilience," it went on to say.

The IMF team was led by Julie Kozack, Deputy Director of the Western Hemisphere Department, and Luis Cubeddu, mission chief for Argentina, while Argentina's Economy Minister Martin Guzmán and his team represented the Argentine side, according to the statement.

The meetings took place on July 8-12 in Venice, Italy.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

#### India Expands Maritime Reconnaissance With Delivery of 10th Surveillance Aircraft – Boeing

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) – India took delivery of the tenth P-8 maritime surveillance aircraft, expanding the nation's anti-submarine warfare capabilities, Boeing said on Tuesday. "This is the second aircraft to be delivered under an option contract for four additional aircraft that the Indian Ministry of Defense awarded in 2016," Boeing said in a press release. Boeing supports India's growing P-8I fleet by providing training of Indian Navy flight crews, spare parts, ground support equipment and field service representative support, the release said.

The support includes construction of a training and maintenance center for Indian Navy crews, now nearing completion, to provide ground-based instruction as additional surveillance aircraft becomes available, the release added.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

#### IMF Says Holds Productive Meetings With Argentine Authorities to Advance Support Program

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) - The International Monetary Fund (IMF) said on Tuesday that its staff held productive discussions with the Argentine authorities on moving forward the work towards the fund-supported program.

"The Argentine authorities and IMF staff held productive meetings to further advance the technical work towards an IMF-supported program," the statement said. "The IMF team and the Argentine authorities will continue working together in the period ahead with a view to further deepening their understandings in these key areas. Our goal is to support Argentina as it durably addresses its economic and balance of payment challenges."

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

#### US Consumer Prices Up 5.4% in Year to June, Most Since 2008 - Labor Dept

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) - The US Consumer Price Index, a measure of inflation, grew by 5.4 percent over a one-year period in June for its largest increase in 13 years, the Labor Department announced on Tuesday.



"Over the last 12 months, the all items index increased 5.4 percent before seasonal adjustment," the department said, breaking down the data. "This was the largest 12-month increase since a 5.4-percent increase for the period ending August 2008."

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

US First Lady to Attend Opening of Tokyo Olympic Games - White House

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) - US First Lady Jill Biden will attend the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games which are due to take place in Tokyo on July 23, the White House's office of the first lady said in a statement on Tuesday.

"First Lady Jill Biden will travel to the Opening Ceremony of the 2021 Olympic Summer Games in Tokyo, Japan. The Opening Ceremony of the 2021 Olympic Summer Games will be held on July 23, 2021. Additional information and details to come," the statement said.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

Afghanistan Has Supply of COVID-19 Vaccines, But Full Distribution Not Reached Yet - UN

UNITED NATIONS, July 12 (Sputnik) - Afghanistan has the supply and access to vaccines against the coronavirus disease, but has yet to achieve vaccines distribution across the country, UN Deputy Special Representative Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Afghanistan Ramiz Alakbarov told Sputnik on Tuesday.

"Now, vaccines and access to them are available in the country. However, vaccine distribution and complete inoculation of the population have not been achieved yet," Alakbarov said.

According to him, just about 2 percent of the population has already received at least one dose of the vaccine.

Alakbarov said Afghanistan received more than a million doses of the Johnson & Johnson vaccines from the US government on Saturday. AstraZeneca vaccines had also been shipped to the country, he added.

The special coordinator also noted the Islamic Republic has begun to see a slight decline in COVID-19 cases after recently facing a "dire situation" caused by a third wave of the pandemic.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

Afghan Authorities Able to Ensure Protection of International Aid Staff - UN Coordinator

UNITED NATIONS, July 12 (Sputnik) - Afghanistan authorities have been able to ensure the safety and security of international organizations' personnel working in the country, UN Deputy Special Representative Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Afghanistan Ramiz Alakbarov told Sputnik on Tuesday.

"Local authorities are providing security for International staff working in Afghanistan. They allocate for this all resources they have and try to provide maximum protection and support," Alakbarov said.

"The situation across the country's regions is different, but the authorities do their best, for which we are very grateful," he added.

At the moment, Afghanistan is facing a standoff between government forces and the Taliban, who reportedly took over 85% of the country following the announcement of the US troop pullout in April. Anti-terrorist operations are being conducted across Afghanistan to prevent a further takeover.

Last week, the US Central Command said the withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan was 90% complete. The deadline for a full exit was set for September 11. At the same time, Commanding General Austin Miller warned that the country might be on the path to civil war after Washington and its allies are through pulling out their troops.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

#### UN Continues to Work in Afghanistan But Conflict Affects Aid Deliveries - Coordinator

UNITED NATIONS, July 12 (Sputnik) - The United Nations and humanitarian partners continue to work in Afghanistan, but the ongoing military hostilities interrupt their activities and the delivery of aid, UN Deputy Special Representative Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Afghanistan Ramiz Alakbarov told Sputnik on Tuesday.

"We continue our work in Afghanistan, but military action does not help to ensure uninterrupted delivery of supplies and smooth operations," Alakbarov said. "Nevertheless, international NGOs and the United Nations continue to be present in Afghanistan and provide humanitarian assistance practically throughout the entire territory of the country."

Alakbarov said humanitarian agencies in the Islamic Republic have seen the deterioration of access and worsened security situation due to the mining of territories and the increased incidence of attack on aid workers.

"In the first half of 2021, 25 humanitarian workers were killed, 63 were injured and 83 were arrested," Alakbarov said. "In the first six months, we had 1,120 incidents related to humanitarian access, while in 2020, there were only 1,095 such incidents. In June alone, we had 259 such incidents."

The UN official attributed the worsening of the security environment for humanitarian actors in Afghanistan to the US troops' withdrawal, among other reasons.

Afghanistan is seeing a spike in violence from the Taliban (banned in Russia) as international troops are gradually being withdrawn from the country. The troop pullout was one of the points of agreement the Taliban and the United States reached in Doha in February of last year. In



early July, the Pentagon said that the US had withdrawn over 90% of the US military personnel and equipment from Afghanistan.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

Next 6 Months of Conflict in Afghanistan to Produce 1Mln Displaced People - UN Coordinator

UNITED NATIONS, July 12 (Sputnik) - The United Nations projects the continuation of the conflict in Afghanistan for the next half year will result in approximately one million refugees, UN Deputy Special Representative Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Afghanistan Ramiz Alakbarov told Sputnik on Tuesday.

"We observe that with the current intensity of the conflict, three months of hostilities will result in 500,000 displaced persons. Continuation of the conflict for up to six months will cause the displacement of approximately one million people," Alakbarov said.

He noted that while it is expected that some people would be fleeing into neighboring countries, the majority of the refugees would find themselves displaced within Afghanistan.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

No Significant Refugee Movement Seen From Afghanistan, Majority Displaced Internally - UN

UNITED NATIONS, July 12 (Sputnik) - The United Nations in Afghanistan has not yet reported any significant flow of refugees into neighboring countries and the largest displaced group is comprised of people uprooted internally, UN Deputy Special Representative Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Afghanistan Ramiz Alakbarov told Sputnik.

"As of today, we do not see any significant movement, large groups of people crossing the border," Alakbarov said. "The displacement outside of Afghanistan due to hostilities has not yet been as significant as internal displacement. The bulk of the displaced people today are those internally displaced."

Alakbarov explained internal displacement is caused by the fighting between Afghan government forces and the opposition Taliban movement, as well as drought. He also said displaced individuals tend to move toward urban areas where they hope to find shelter, food and medical assistance.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

Civilian Casualties Increase 30% in Afghanistan in 2021 Amid US Pullout - UN Coordinator

UNITED NATIONS, July 12 (Sputnik) - Afghanistan has seen a 30 percent increase in civilian deaths or injuries in the first quarter of this year amid the US decision to withdraw its troops from the country, UN Deputy Special Representative Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Afghanistan Ramiz Alakbarov told Sputnik on Tuesday.

"Since the beginning of the year, in the first quarter, some 1,783 civilians were reported either killed or wounded. This is a 30 percent increase compared to the number reported in the first quarter of 2020," Alakbarov said.

Alakbarov specified that the violence spiked with the expectation of the United States to pull its forces out of the Islamic Republic.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

**New York Mayor-Elect Says Biden to Redefine 'Ecosystem of Public Safety' in US**

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) - New York Mayor-elect Eric Adams said President Joe Biden plans to redefine the ecosystem of public safety in order to address the issue of gun violence in the United States.

"This president is making it clear, he's going to redefine the ecosystem of public safety and that includes identifying the role of police, schools, families, resources, employment," Adams said on Monday afternoon after meeting with Biden to discuss the issue of gun violence.

Earlier this month, New York declared a state of emergency against gun violence and Governor Andrew Cuomo also signed into law a bill to reinstate a public nuisance liability against gun manufacturers to make them liable to civil suits for injuries and deaths suffered by both individuals and the state from shootings.

Gun violence in New York has surged amid an increase of crime in the state during the past year. Nationally, deaths from shootings in major US cities are up 18 percent year-over-year and that's after 2020 brought the largest single-year increase ever recorded.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

**US Army Orders \$320M In More Stinger Ground-to-Air Missiles From Raytheon - Pentagon**

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) - The Raytheon Company has won a new more than \$320-million contract from the US Army to manufacture more Stinger ground-to-air missiles, the Defense Department announced.

"Raytheon Company [of] Tucson, Arizona was awarded a \$320,667,721 firm-fixed-price contract for Stinger missile production," the Defense Department said in a press release on Monday.

The missiles will be delivered over the next five years with an estimated completion date of June 30, 2026, the Defense Department said.



The FIM-92 Stinger is a man-portable air defense system (MANPADS) that operates as an infrared homing surface-to-air missile and can be fired from a wide variety of ground vehicles and helicopters.

The Stinger was developed in the United States and first entered service in 1981. So far, 70,000 such missiles have been produced and they are used by the US armed forces and by the militaries of 29 other countries.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

Pentagon Works as Part of US Interagency Effort to Aid Haiti Probe - Spokesman to Sputnik

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) - The Defense Department is working as part of the United States' effort to assist Haiti after the assassination of President Jovenel Moise and will participate in further discussions on the matter, a department spokesperson told Sputnik.

"DoD [Defense Department] is working as part of an interagency effort," the spokesperson said. A US delegation traveled to Haiti on Sunday at the request of the local authorities, the spokesperson noted.

"In the near term, the interagency [team] will be discussing insights from Sunday's trip. DoD will participate in these discussions," the spokesperson said.

Earlier on Monday, US President Joe Biden said the United States stands ready to continue to provide assistance to Haiti in wake of the assassination of Moise.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

US Air Force Orders \$530Mln R&D Services for Nuclear Strategic Missile Programs - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) - Johns Hopkins University has won a \$530 million US Air Force contract for research and development services in support of the US strategic nuclear program and its two ground-based intercontinental ballistic missile systems, the Defense Department announced.

"Johns Hopkins University [of] Laurel, Maryland, has been awarded a \$530 million ... contract for research and development services in support of the nuclear enterprise," the Defense Department said in a press release on Monday.

Johns Hopkins University has also been awarded the first task order for research and development services for \$23,717,889 to support the Ground Based Strategic Deterrent weapon system, the release said.

"These contracts provide research and development services in support of the two intercontinental ballistic missile systems. Work will be performed in Laurel, Maryland, with support being available until July 15, 2031," the release added.

The contract will be supervised by the Air Force Nuclear Weapons Center at Hill Air Force Base in the US state of Utah, according to the release.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

#### **Trump Organization Removes Weisselberg as Financial Officer - Business Documents**

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) - The Trump Organization has removed Allen Weisselberg as an officer at some of the organization's subsidiaries after he pleaded not guilty to accusations of tax fraud, business documents revealed.

The Trump Payroll Corp. used to list Weisselberg as treasurer, director, vice president and secretary on its business documents, but now the former president's sons - Donald Trump Jr. and Eric Trump - are listed in those roles on the Florida Division of Corporations records.

Weisselberg resigned on July 8 from the position director of the Trump International Golf Club Scotland Limited, according to the United Kingdom's registrar of companies.

The Trump Organization and Weisselberg were charged in a New York court earlier this month with a number of tax crimes ranging over a 15-year timespan, including a scheme to defraud, conspiracy, grand larceny and falsifying of business records.

Both, the Trump Organization and Weisselberg pleaded not guilty to the charges. Former president Donald Trump has characterized the charges as being politically motivated.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

#### **Biden Drops Case Against TikTok, ByteDance - US Court Document**

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden has asked a US court to dismiss his predecessor Donald Trump's case against the Chinese social video platform TikTok and its parent ByteDance, a court document revealed.

"Defendants-appellants hereby move to voluntarily dismiss this appeal, with each party to bear its own fees and costs for the appeal," the document, filed in the US Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia that named TikTok as the plaintiff and Biden as the defendant, said on Monday.

The September 24 appeal was originally filed by the Trump administration after the court denied the former president's bid to legally outlaw TikTok and ByteDance in the United States.

Earlier in June, Biden canceled at the government level Trump's executive order to ban TikTok. While Biden has undone most of Trump's executive orders on immigration, climate change and other matters, he has left intact his predecessor's tariffs imposed on China, indicating he might use them to pressure Beijing into making concessions on trade and other issues.



**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

#### **Wall Street Hits Record Highs on Expectation US Inflation Will Not Stay High**

NEW YORK, July 12 (Sputnik) - Wall Street's three key stock indices all hit record highs on Monday on expectations that strong inflationary trends in the United States will not persist, and the economy will have a good landing by the year-end with encouraging jobs growth.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average, the broadest US equity barometer on the New York Stock Exchange, hit a record high of 35,015 before closing at 34,996, up 126 points or 0.4 percent.

The S&P 500 index, which groups the top 500 stocks on the New York Stock Exchange, reached an all-time peak of 4,387 before settling at 4,385, up 15 points or 0.4 percent.

The Nasdaq Composite index, which includes high-flying tech stocks such as Facebook, Amazon, Apple, Microsoft, Netflix and Google, hit a historic high of 14,761 before finishing the day at 14,733, up 31 points or 0.2 percent.

Earlier on Monday, Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis Neel Kashyap said US inflation will subside over time and the job market will likely pick up later in the year despite high price pressures and uneven employment as the economy tries to recover.

The Personal Consumption Expenditure Index - the Federal Reserve's preferred gauge for inflation - increased by a multiyear high of 3.4 percent in the 12 months to May when stripped of volatile food and energy prices.

The economy shrank 3.5 percent in 2020, although first quarter data for 2021 showed a dynamic rebound of 6.4 percent. The Federal Reserve has forecast a 6.5 percent growth for all of 2021.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

#### **SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY**

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) -

#### **US-RUSSIA CYBERSECURITY TALKS**

\* All Russian proposals to Washington for work in the cybersphere have been sent, Moscow is waiting for a reaction from the US side, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov said on Monday.

\*US and Russian experts continue their consultations on various cybersecurity issues, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said.

#### **PROTESTS IN CUBA**

\* Russia believes that foreign interference in Cuba's domestic affairs is unacceptable, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said on Monday.

- \* The ongoing protests in Cuba are an internal matter and are not likely to be discussed at the UN Security Council, Russian Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations Dmitry Polyanskiy told reporters.
- \* US President Joe Biden expressed support for the protests in Cuba and called on the government to respond to the people's demands.
- \* The Cuban authorities do not seek confrontation among the citizens, as activists earlier faced street violence during anti-government rallies, President Miguel Diaz-Canel said.

#### HAITI DEVELOPMENTS

- \* The United States is aware of the detention of the third American national in a probe over the murder of the late Haitian President, State Department Spokesperson Ned Price said.
- \* The United States has not yet decided whether to send military troops to Haiti after receiving a request from the country for such assistance, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said.
- \* The US government has received a request for additional assistance in the investigation into the assassination of President Jovenel Moise, Psaki said.

#### JOHN KERRY VISIT TO MOSCOW

- \* The United States is very glad that Russian President Vladimir Putin participated in the climate summit and is reiterates that it is seeking rational and predictable ties with Moscow, US Special Envoy for Climate John Kerry said on Monday.
- \* The United States and Russia have constructive climate proposals to work through and that may herald the beginning of a new effort to address the global crisis, Kerry said.
- \* Russia plans to cooperate with other countries on climate at international forums and expects to work with the United States closely, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said.

#### RUSSIA-UKRAINE RELATIONS

- \* Sovereign Ukraine has no place in the Western "Anti-Russia project," Russian President Vladimir Putin said in a big article about Ukraine, which was published Monday.
- \* Putin believes that the divide between Russia and Ukraine was the result of mistakes of different periods and the result of the work of forces that sought to undermine unity.
- \* Russia helped Ukraine save more than \$82 billion on low gas prices alone between 1991 and 2013, Putin said.
- \* Putin believes that Ukraine's true sovereignty is possible precisely in partnership with Russia.

#### CORONAVIRUS VACCINES

- \* Mixing different coronavirus vaccines is a "dangerous trend" and could lead to chaos, WHO Chief Scientist Soumya Swaminathan said on Monday.
- \* The World Health Organization (WHO) does not have evidence of the need for a booster shot of the coronavirus vaccine, Ann Lindstrand, a WHO official, said, amid reports of Pfizer planning to seek authorization for a booster.

#### MOLDOVA ELECTION



\* Former Moldova President Igor Dodon, who co-chairs the electoral bloc of Communists and Socialists, on Monday congratulated the pro-Western Action and Solidarity Party (PAS) party on winning snap parliamentary elections.

\* The time of Moldova's good relations with Russia seems to be over as pro-European movements are coming to power, Dodon said.

\* Russia respects the results of early parliamentary elections in Moldova and expects that they will contribute to interethnic harmony in society, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

**US Has Not Made Any Determination on Atrocities in Central African Republic - State Dept.**

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) - The United States has not made any determination whether any atrocities are taking place in the Central African Republic (CAR) as the conflict following the presidential elections in December continues, Acting Assistant US Secretary for the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations Robert Faucher said on Monday.

"At this point in the CAR, we haven't made any determination of the atrocities occurring there," Faucher said at a press briefing when asked whether any atrocities are taking place in CAR today.

Earlier on Monday, the US State Department published a report with predictions of where in the world human rights violations and atrocities are most likely to take place. The report lists Myanmar, China, Ethiopia, Iraq, Syria, South Sudan as countries with the highest risk of possible atrocities and genocide.

The violence erupted in CAR after the general election in December when opponents of Faustin Archange Touadera, who won the presidential vote, accused him of electoral fraud. Armed clashes carried out by the rebel group Coalition of Patriots for Change then broke out throughout the country. US government and military officials have expressed concern over the ongoing conflict in the country on multiple occasions.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

**J&J Discusses With FDA Coronavirus Vaccine Side Effect - Statement**

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) - The Johnson & Johnson pharmaceutical company said on Monday that it has been in discussions with the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) the cases of a neurological disorder reported after vaccinating against the novel coronavirus.

"We have been in discussions with the US Food and Drug Administration and other regulators about rare cases of the neurological disorder, Guillain-Barré syndrome, that have been reported following vaccination with the Janssen COVID-19 vaccine," the company said in a statement.

Johnson & Johnson emphasized that the chances of the side-effect occurring after inoculation is very low.

The company's single-shot vaccine against the coronavirus is one of three approved for use in the United States.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

#### Trump Organization Removes Weisselberg as Financial Officer - Report

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) - Allen Weisselberg was removed by the Trump Organization as an officer at some of its subsidiaries after pleading not guilty to accusations of tax fraud, the Wall Street Journal reported on Monday, citing public filings and people familiar with the situation.

Trump Payroll Corp., used to list Weisselberg as treasurer, director, vice president and secretary on business records, but now Donald Trump Jr. and Eric Trump are listed in those roles.

Weisselberg also lost his position as director of Trump International Golf Club Scotland Limited, according to the UK's registrar of companies.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

#### Biden Asks US Court to Dismiss Case Against TikTok, ByteDance - Court Document

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden has asked a US court to dismiss his predecessor Donald Trump's case against Chinese social video app TikTok and its parent ByteDance, a court document showed Monday.

"Defendants-appellants hereby move to voluntarily dismiss this appeal, with each party to bear its own fees and costs for the appeal," showed the document filed in the US Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia that named TikTok as the plaintiff and Biden as the defendant.

The September 24 appeal was originally filed by the Trump administration after the court denied the former president's bid to legally outlaw TikTok and ByteDance in the United States. Earlier in June, Biden cancelled at the government level Trump's executive order to ban TikTok.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

#### US, Turkey Discussing Kabul International Airport Security After Drawdown- Pentagon



WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) - The United States and Turkey are currently discussing what security at the Kabul international airport will look like once US forces complete the withdrawal from Afghanistan, Pentagon Press Secretary John Kirby said on Monday.

"As all forces drawdown out of Afghanistan, there are going to have to be adjustments made to who else is helping the Turks and in what way that help is being rendered, that's the discussion that's happening right now," Kirby said in a press briefing.

Turkey offered to take over responsibility for securing the airport once NATO forces withdraw - but on certain conditions, including financial and logistical backing.

The United States currently has forces dedicated to providing security at the airport, which includes air support and other defensive capabilities, Kirby said.

The departure of US and NATO forces from Afghanistan, scheduled to be completed by August 31, has been met with a surge in violence with dozens of districts in Afghanistan falling to the Taliban in the past weeks.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

US Aware of Detention of 3rd American Citizen in Haiti Investigation - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) - The United States is aware of the detention of the third American national in a probe over the murder of the late Haitian President, State Department Spokesperson Ned Price said in a press briefing on Monday.

"We are aware of the detention of a third US citizen," Price said. "We continue to monitor the situation closely. As in all cases, we will provide appropriate consular services to detained US citizens."

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

US Envoy Ready to Resume JCPOA Talks Once 7th Round Scheduled - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) - US Special Envoy Robert Malley is ready to resume talks on the Iran nuclear agreement - formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) - once the seventh round is scheduled, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Monday.

"Special [US] Envoy [Robert] Malley, and his team are prepared to return to Vienna for a seventh round of talks, as soon as they are scheduled," Price said at a press briefing.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

#### US Aware of China's Nuclear Silos Construction, Concerned About Modernization - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) - The United States is aware of China's nuclear buildup, including the construction of new silos, but won't disclose its intelligence assessments, the Pentagon spokesman John Kirby told reporters on Monday.

"We are not going to get into intelligence assessments of Chinese nuclear capabilities... We remain concerned about China's modernization and the development of capabilities that in many ways seemed to serve no other purpose than to try to prevent the US and allied access to areas of the Indo-Pacific," Kirby said during a briefing.

Recent satellite images revealed the construction of 119 missile silos in China's Gansu province. China is believed to have an arsenal of 250 to 350 nuclear weapons, according to published reports.

"We made no secret in fact that we are aware that they continue to build out nuclear capabilities including the construction of silos," Kirby said.

The State Department earlier said that new silos reported by US media may suggest that China's nuclear arsenal will "grow more quickly and to a higher level than perhaps previously anticipated."

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

#### Cybercriminals Driven by Profitability of Ransomware Attacks - FBI Cyber Division

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) - Cybercriminals engaging in ransomware attacks are motivated to do so because of the crime's profitability, Deputy Assistant Director of the FBI's Cyber Division Herb Stapleton said on Monday.

"At the end of the day, most of these actors who are launching ransomware attacks against entities within the United States and elsewhere around the globe are interested in earning a profit, and so as they have seen that this type of activity continues to bring in revenue and be profitable, that has continued to fuel the efforts of these organizations to launch these attacks for a profit motive," Stapleton said during a Third Way event on cybercrime policy.

Stapleton added that the ability of cybercriminals to obtain the necessary tools for ransomware attacks from the dark web has lowered the barrier to entry for committing the crime in recent years, and that cryptocurrencies have made ransomware attacks easier to do anonymously. The event was held amid a marked rise in ransomware attacks over the last several months against US-based companies, including Colonial Pipeline, the Republican National Committee, and the automation software provider Kaseya.

The cybercriminals responsible for the Kaseya ransomware attack demanded \$70 million to unlock the systems, but the company returned to full service Monday morning claiming to not have paid the ransom.

Colonial Pipeline, however, paid hackers a \$4.4 million ransom in Bitcoin to lift the attackers' stranglehold on the company. The FBI claimed that they were able to recover 63.7 of the 75 bitcoins through a seize warrant on the address to which they were sent.



**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

**Top US General Miller Leaves Afghanistan After Stepping Down From Post - Pentagon**

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) - The top US general in Afghanistan, Scott Miller, has left the country after stepping down from his post earlier in the day, Pentagon Press Secretary John Kirby said on Monday.

"General Miller departed Afghanistan, he's on his way back to the United States," Kirby said. Miller handed authority of US forces in Afghanistan to Central Command Commander Gen. Frank McKenzie.

Kirby noted that McKenzie has the authority to conduct airstrikes against the Taliban if necessary.

Gen. Scott Miller has been the commander of the US forces in Afghanistan since September 2, 2018, making him the longest-serving top military commander in the course of nearly 20 years of US presence in Afghanistan.

The United States is expected to complete its withdrawal from Afghanistan by August 31.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

**US Having Ongoing Discussions With Turkey on Cooperation in Afghanistan - State Department**

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) - The United States is holding discussions with Turkey on cooperation in Afghanistan, US State Department spokesman Ned Price said on Monday at a briefing.

"We have had discussions with our Turkish partners in the context of broader cooperation in Afghanistan. Those discussions are ongoing," Price said when asked about the cooperation between Washington and Ankara on Afghanistan.

He added that the US welcomes Turkey's "constructive role" in withdrawal and in providing safety and security situation in Afghanistan.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

**US Concerned Over Escalation in Tigray, Urges Sides to Move to Ceasefire – State Dept.**

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) – The US is concerned over the recent escalation of the conflict in the Tigray region of Ethiopia and urges all sides to move to a negotiated ceasefire in the interest of civilians, the Department of State spokesperson said on Monday.

"The United States is gravely concerned by reports of ongoing hostilities in western Tigray, and evidence of escalating military conflict there. Escalating fighting will undermine critical ongoing efforts to deliver humanitarian relief to famine-affected populations," Price said at a press briefing. "We again call on the Tigrayan defense forces, the Amhara regional forces and Ethiopian national defense forces to move towards a negotiated ceasefire in the interest of civilians in the region."

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

**US Giving Afghanistan 37 Black Hawks, Will Help Refurbish Mi-17 Fleet - Pentagon**

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) - The United States will beef up the Afghanistan Air Force with 37 Black Hawk helicopters and help to refurbish a large part of its fleet of Russian-made Mi-17 helicopters, the Pentagon spokesman John Kirby told reporters on Monday.

"We are going to be giving them another 37 Blackhawk helicopters. That is more than they have right now, so in effect doubling their attack helicopter capability... And we have agreed to help refurbish... a good part of their fleet of Mi-17 helicopters," Kirby said during a briefing.

The US will also be giving to the Afghan military three more Super Tucano strike airplanes increasing their military edge over the opposition forces.

"They have a robust Air Force, the Taliban does not. And they can use that Air Force in a strike capacity in support of their troops on the ground," Kirby said.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

**Blinken Says Would Be Mistake for Cuban Gov't to Say US Involved in Protests**

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a press briefing on Monday that it would be a "grievous mistake" on the part of Havana to say that Washington is involved in the ongoing protests.

"I think it would be a grievous mistake for the Cuban regime to interpret what is happening in dozens of towns and cities across the island as a result or product of anything the United States has done," Blinken said. "It would be a grievous mistake because it would show that they simply are not hearing the voices and will of the Cuban people."

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

**US Fed Executive Kashkari Insists Inflation to Normalize, Job Markets to Rebound**



WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) - US inflation will subside over time and the job market will likely pick up later in the year despite high price pressures and uneven employment now as the economy tries to steady from the worst impacts of the coronavirus pandemic, Minneapolis Federal Reserve President Neel Kashkari said.

"I am in the camp that inflation is transitory," Kashkari said at a live-streamed event on Monday. "Once the economy is ready, policy will start to be normalized. We should see a lot more labor supply in the fall."

Commodity-fueled inflation has become a hot-button issue in the United States since late last year, when COVID-19 vaccine breakthroughs unleashed price rallies in most raw materials amid forecasts for rapid economic recovery from the pandemic. Constraints in supply chains seeing explosive demand after months of lax activity have added to the upward price pressure in most commodities.

The White House on Friday also blamed the lack of competition in American industry as one reason for the current inflationary trends, saying few large competitors controlled the market in most industries, forcing price mark-ups as much as three times in prices of necessities such as prescription drugs, hearing aids and internet services.

The US economy itself shrank 3.5 percent in 2020, although first-quarter data for 2021 showed a dynamic rebound of 6.4 percent.

The Fed's problem though is inflation. The Personal Consumption Expenditure Index — the central bank's preferred gauge for inflation — rose by a multiyear high of 3.4 percent in the 12 months to May when stripped of volatile food and energy prices.

The Federal Reserve has forecast a 6.5 percent economic growth for all of 2021 although Jerome Powell, chairman of the central bank, says he does not expect so-called full employment — defined by a monthly unemployment rate of 4.0 percent or lower — to occur anytime soon. The monthly unemployment rate stood at 5.8 percent in June.

Kashkari said the US economy remains in a "deep hole" and it was important that the Fed did not raise interest rates too quickly, which it has kept at between zero and 0.25 percent since the COVID outbreak in March 2020.

"I do not wish to prematurely cut off the recovery," Kashkari said. "By fall, I expect a fairly robust labor-market revival."

The United States lost more than 21 million jobs between March and April 2020, at the height of business lockdowns forced by the coronavirus. About 8 million of those jobs have yet to return, officials say.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

**Canadians Can Have Confidence in Health System After WHO Decries Vaccine Mixing - Minister**

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) - Canadians can have confidence in the country's health officials, which had approved the mixing of coronavirus vaccines, Minister of International

Development Karina Gould said on Monday in response to a top World Health organization (WHO) scientist dismissing the practice.

"We always need to ask questions of Health Canada and NACI [National Advisory Committee on Immunizations] NACI, who are the ones making these recommendations, but I think we can all have a lot of confidence they are doing it with our best interests and with the health and safety of Canadians top of mind," Gould said during a press briefing.

Earlier on Monday, WHO Chief Scientist Soumya Swaminathan said that mixing different coronavirus vaccines is a "dangerous trend" and could lead to chaos, contradicting NACI's advice.

Last month, NACI advised that those Canadians who have received the AstraZeneca shot as the first dose in their vaccination schedule may get vaccinated with a messenger RNA (mRNA) vaccine for their second dose, noting that it considers the two mRNA vaccines currently approved for use in Canada - produced by Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna - interchangeable.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

**WFP Says It Reached Tigray With 50 Trucks of Aid, More Assistance Needed**

UNITED NATIONS, July 12 (Sputnik) - The World Food Programme (WFP) said on Monday a convoy of 50 trucks carrying supplies has reached Ethiopia's conflict-ridden Tigray region but much more assistance is needed to meet the humanitarian needs.

"A WFP convoy of 50 trucks arrived in the Tigrayan capital of Mekelle today with 900 metric tons of food as well as other emergency supplies. However, double this number of trucks needs to be moving in every day to meet the vast humanitarian needs in the region," the WFP said in a statement.

The convoy was the first aid delivery into Tigray since the restart of WFP's operations in the northwest on July 2.

To meet the needs of almost 4 million people in Tigray, the UN food agency said it must transport over 10,000 metric tons of food and 150,000 liters of fuel every week.

The latest WFP analysis projected that over 400,000 people would be facing catastrophic levels of hunger in Tigray from July. Some 4 million people, or 70 percent of the region's population, already experience high levels of acute food insecurity.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

**FDA Expected to Issue J&J Vaccine Warning After Finding Autoimmune Disorder Link - Report**

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) - The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is expected to issue a new warning for the Johnson & Johnson (J&J) coronavirus vaccine following reports of

its link to the onset of an autoimmune disorder, the *Washington Post* reported on Monday, citing four people familiar with the matter.

Roughly 100 cases of Guillain-Barre syndrome have been reported following administration of the J&J vaccine. The immune systems of those afflicted with the syndrome begin to attack the body's own peripheral nervous system, which can result in muscle weakness, cardiovascular complications, and death. Most of the reported cases involved men over the age of 50, with the syndrome's onset beginning about 2 weeks after receiving the vaccine.

A spike in cases has also been associated with vaccinations administered in response to the 1976 swine flu outbreak.

"It's a real signal but a rare event," one of the cited individuals said, adding that the link is not yet definitive, and officials are expected to emphasize that the benefits of the vaccine are greater than the risks.

The use of the J&J vaccine, which requires only a single dose unlike many other coronavirus vaccines, was already halted once in April after it was linked to blood clots. Following a safety review, the J&J vaccine use resumed, but the authorities placed a warning label.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

#### **Biden Says US Stands Ready to Continue to Provide Assistance to Haiti**

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Monday the United States stands ready to continue to provide assistance to Haiti in wake of the assassination of Haitian President Jovenel Moise.

"As a close neighbor and friend of the people of both Cuba and Haiti, the United States stands ready to continue to provide assistance and I'll have more for you as we move on," Biden told reporters.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

#### **Biden Voices Support For Cuban Protesters, Calls on Gov't to Refrain From Violence**

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Monday that the United States stands firm with the people of Cuba and calls on the Cuban government to refrain from using violence against protesters.

"The United States stands firmly with the people of Cuba as they assert their universal rights," Biden told reporters. "We call on the government of Cuba to refrain from violence in their attempts to silence the voice of the people of Cuba."



**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

US Extends License Allowing Transactions With Venezuela's PdVSA Until July 2022 – Treasury

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) – US Treasury on Monday extended its general license authorizing exportation and re-exportation of liquefied petroleum gas to and from Venezuela with the participation of the government-owned company, Petroleos de Venezuela, S.A. (PdVSA).

“... all transactions and activities related to the exportation or reexportation, directly or indirectly, of liquefied petroleum gas to Venezuela, involving the Government of Venezuela, Petróleos de Venezuela, S.A. (PdVSA), or any entity in which PdVSA owns, directly or indirectly, a 50 percent or greater interest, [...] are authorized through 12:01 a.m. eastern daylight time, July 8, 2022,” the license said.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

ROCOR Sees Vaccination as Personal Choice, Not Issue of Spiritual Life - Synod Chancellor

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) - The Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR) considers the issue of receiving or not receiving the coronavirus vaccine as a matter of personal choice for each individual and one that is not related to spiritual life, the Synod of Bishops Chancellor protopriest Serafim Gan told Sputnik.

“Getting vaccinated or not, I think, is a personal and civic position of each individual. That is not a question of spiritual life,” Serafim said.

On July 5, Metropolitan of Pskov and Porkhov Tikhon urged Christian believers to get vaccinated but acknowledged this is a choice and responsibility of each individual.

Serafim said the ROCOR leadership has not taken a position on the issue of vaccination given that it can divide the people while the role of the church is to unify them.

“Many of our priests and bishops are vaccinated. However, people concerned with the possibility of mandatory measures from the nation’s civic authorities may consider that as an impairment of freedoms and rights,” he said.

Serafim acknowledged the views on whether to vaccinate vary but noted that people can differ in their opinions on the matter and still pray side by side.

“Mutual respect and patience is our Christian minimum,” he said.

Regarding safety measures in response to the coronavirus pandemic, Gan supported the idea of providing additional education as many people as possible.

“Those who afraid to get vaccinated for some reasons should take precautions not to contaminate others, while those vaccinated should not condemn them and keep inward peace,” he said.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

**UN Expert Urges Israel to End Demolitions of Palestinian Bedouin Property - Statement**

UNITED NATIONS, July 12 (Sputnik) - UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian Territory Michael Lynk called on Israel on Monday to stop demolitions of houses in the occupied territory amid the destruction of property in the Palestinian Bedouin community of Humsa al-Baqai'a.

In the latest set of demolitions on July 7, the Israeli Civil Administration demolished 27 residential shelters and confiscated the community's belongings in the northern Jordan Valley of the occupied West Bank, the UN human rights office (OHCHR) said.

"We again call on Israel to immediately halt its property demolitions in the occupied territory, to ensure that its actions are strictly compliant with its international humanitarian and human rights obligations and to provide protection for, rather than displacement of, the protected population," Link said.

Lynk also called on the international community to take concrete accountability measures to ensure that Israel complies with its obligations under International law.

"Only by imposing an escalating cost to Israel's illegal occupation will there be the prospect that these injustices will end," the UN expert said.

As a result of the demolitions, around 70 people belonging to the Humsa al-Baqai'a community, including 35 children, were displaced, and their water, food and clothing were sequestered. Eleven of the structures demolished were provided to the community as an international humanitarian response after Israel destroyed some 55 structures in the same area in February. According to the United Nations, in 2021, Israel has demolished or seized at least 421 Palestinian structures, displacing 592 people across the West Bank.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

**IMF Chief Submits Proposed \$650Bln SDR Increase to Board of Governors for Final Approval**

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) - International Monetary Fund (IMF) Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva has submitted a proposal to the organization's Board of Governors for a final approval of the proposed increase for Special Drawing Rights (SDR) by \$650 billion, the IMF said in a statement on Monday.

"On July 9, IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva submitted her proposal for a general allocation of Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) equivalent to US\$650 billion to the Board of Governors for its approval. The proposal follows the Executive Board discussion of the general allocation of SDRs on June 25 and its formal support of the proposal on July 8," the statement said.

The Board of Governors is scheduled to vote on the proposal by August 2, the statement added.

The proposal has to get the support of IMF members representing an 85 percent majority of the total voting power of the SDR Department participants, which currently encompasses all members, according to the statement.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

**US Reviewing Request to Send Troops to Haiti, Has Not Ruled Out Idea - White House**

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) - The United States has not yet decided whether to send military troops to Haiti after receiving a request from the country for such assistance, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki told reporters on Monday.

"That's correct... It's still under review," Psaki said during a press briefing, adding that the proposal has not been ruled out.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

**US-Russia Expert-Level Cybertalks 'Ongoing' - White House**

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) - US and Russian experts continue their consultations on various cybersecurity issues, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said on Monday.

"There have been ongoing meetings at an expert level and discussions with Russian officials and the most important thing we can do is preserve space for those conversations to happen and hopefully progress to be made," Psaki said during a briefing.

Psaki refused to detail the agenda of the consultations or provide a list of participants.

"I think it's safe to assume that high level cybersecurity experts and members of our national security team are the appropriate points of contact with their Russian counterparts," she said.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

**US Should Divert Half of \$1.2Bln in Military Aid for Egypt to Tunisia - Congressman**

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) - The United States should take half of the \$1.2 billion in military aid it provides to Egypt and use the money to assist Tunisia, US Congressman Tom Malinowski said during a discussion at the Middle East Institute on Monday.

"If I had my druthers, I'd take every penny of the \$1.2 billion that we give to the Egyptians, and maybe spend half of it on scholarships for Egyptian students and the other half on security and economic assistance to Tunisia. But whatever we end up doing with Egypt, yes, I think we can and should do more for Tunisia," Malinowski said.



The remark was prompted by a question about whether acquiring funding for Tunisia would be a priority for Malinowski, who currently serves as the Vice Chair of the US House Foreign Affairs Committee. Malinowski previously served on the National Security Council and as the Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights, Democracy and Labor.

Malinowski said that Tunisia does not get as much attention as it should in the United States diplomacy in the Middle East. The congressman said Tunisia is one country to emerge from the Arab Spring revolutions with a functioning democracy. He also noted that Tunisia has fought alongside the United States against the Islamic State terror group (outlawed in Russia). In addition, Tunisia is currently experiencing a spike in COVID-19 cases and the United States needs to decide how it can assist the country to address the pandemic-related issues.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

#### **US Officials Visiting Haiti Asked to Provide More Aid to Assassination Probe - White House**

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) - The US government has received a request for additional assistance in the investigation into the assassination of President Jovenel Moise, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said on Monday.

A delegation of US intelligence and security officials traveled to Haiti on Sunday and met with acting Prime Minister Claude Joseph, Prime Minister-Designate Ariel Henry and with Haitian National Police representatives who are conducting the investigation into Moise's assassination. "While they were there, they worked to get a better understanding of the request for assistance and to offer assistance to law enforcement forces, on the ground they met with both the acting prime minister and Prime Minister Designate as both of those individuals and they did receive requests, while they were there on the ground for additional assistance," Psaki said.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

#### **US Has Every Indication Protests in Cuba 'Spontaneous' - White House**

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) - The United States has every indication that the protests in Cuba over the weekend were spontaneous and not prompted by other countries, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said during a press briefing on Monday.

"There's every indication that yesterday's protests were spontaneous expressions of people who were exhausted with the Cuban government's economic mismanagement and repression, and these are protests inspired by the harsh reality of everyday life in Cuba, not people in another country," Psaki said.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

Unclear to US What Haiti's Future Political Leadership Will Look Like- White House

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) - Senior US officials during a visit to Haiti were unable to reach any conclusions on what the future of the country's political leadership will look like, White House Press Secretary said on Monday during a daily briefing.

Earlier in the day, the White House announced that that delegation of US intelligence and security officials met with officials in Haiti on Sunday as the Caribbean country is reeling from the assassination of President Jovenel Moise.

"What was not clear [after the US delegation's visit to Haiti] was what the future political leadership looks like in the country," Psaki said. "There is a lack of clarity about the future of political leadership."

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

Boeing Says Providing 12 More 737-800 Freighters to Aircraft Leasing Company BBAM

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) - Boeing said on Monday that it will provide 12 more 737-800 airplanes to the aircraft leasing company BBAM that will utilize them as freighters, adding to the company's earlier order for 19 aircraft.

"The agreement brings BBAM's 737-800BCF orders and commitments to 31 as e-commerce and express cargo markets continue to drive strong customer demand for freighters," Boeing said in a statement.

Boeing said it has won more than 200 orders and commitments from 16 customers for its 737-800 aircraft.

"This most recent order underscores the continued strong demand for our market-leading freighter," Jens Steinhagen, director of Boeing freighter conversions, said in the statement. The San Francisco-based BBAM provides freight jets to airline customers in more than 50 countries.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

UN Office in Haiti Closely Working with Police on Probe Into Moise's Murder - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, July 12 (Sputnik) - The UN Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH) is closely cooperating with the country's national police in the investigation of the assassination of President Jovenel Moise, United Nations spokesperson Farhan Haq said on Monday.

"Right now, on the ground, our office, BINUH, has four police investigation advisers working closely with the Haitian National Police General Inspector and the judicial police to assist with their work," Haq said during a press briefing.

When asked whether the United Nations intends to send its peacekeepers into the country, Haq said it was the responsibility of the UN Security Council to decide on the issue of a potential deployment.

Moise was shot dead at his private residence last week. His wife suffered an abdominal injury during the attack and was airlifted to a hospital in Miami, Florida, for treatment.

The Haitian authorities said a group of 26 Colombians and two US citizens are suspects in Moise's assassination. The head of Moise's security guard, Dimitri Herard, reportedly often traveled to Colombia and is expected to explain his frequent trips to Ecuador with stopovers in Bogota during an upcoming interrogation this week.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

UN Following Cuba Protests, Expects Freedom of Assembly Will Be Respected - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, July 12 (Sputnik) - The United Nations is following the anti-government protests in Cuba and expects the freedom of assembly and expression will be respected, UN spokesman Farhan Haq said in a press briefing on Monday.

On Sunday, protests erupted in Cuba as thousands of people took to the streets to demand free elections and solutions to social problems. Local media reported that protests took place in eight cities on the island nation, including in Havana.

"You're well aware of our normal, principled position on the need for freedom of expression and peaceful assembly to be respected fully... and we are simply following the course of these demonstrations," Haq said.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

US Slaps Visa Restrictions on 100 Nicaraguan Lawmakers, Officials, Their Families

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) - The United States has restricted visas for at least 100 Nicaraguans who are affiliated with the Nicaraguan government, the US State Department said on Monday.

"The Department of State has imposed visa restrictions on 100 members of the Nicaraguan National Assembly and Nicaraguan judicial system, including prosecutors and judges, as well as some of their family members. The Department has revoked any U.S. visas held by these individuals," the statement said.

According to the statement, those affected by the restrictions are the individuals "believed to be responsible for, or complicit in, undermining democracy, including those with responsibility for, or



complicity in, the suppression of peaceful protests or abuse of human rights, and the immediate family members of such persons."

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

#### **Energy Companies Use Chemicals Linked to Cancer, Birth Defects in Fracking – Report**

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) – Chemicals used in US fracking operations to extract oil and natural gas contain and can degrade into so-called forever chemicals that have been linked to cancer and birth defects, the Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR) group announced on Monday.

"A new report, released today by Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR), presents evidence that oil and gas companies including ExxonMobil and Chevron have used per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), and/or substances that can degrade into PFAS, in hydraulic fracturing ('fracking') for oil and gas," PSR said in a press release.

The PFAS and related substances have been used in more than 1,200 wells in six US states between 2012 and 2020, the report said.

"PFAS have been linked to cancer, birth defects, pre-eclampsia, and other serious health effects. Toxic in minuscule concentrations, they accumulate inside the human body and do not break down in the environment – hence their nickname, 'forever chemicals,'" PSR said in the release.

The report also notes that, due to the lack of full disclosure concerning chemicals used, PFAS could have been used in additional states and in drilling and other extraction techniques before fracking operations are applied, the release added. The evidence in the report has not been previously publicized, it said.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

#### **US Software Provider Kaseya Says Fully Restored Operations After Ransomware Attack**

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) - The automation software provider Kaseya said on Monday that it has fully restored services after partially shutting down as a result of a ransomware cyberattack earlier this month.

"The restoration of services is now complete, with 100 percent of our SaaS customers live as of 3:30 am US EDT," Kaseya said.

The attack, allegedly conducted by the Russia-linked REvil hacking group, affected between 800 and 1,500 businesses around the world. The hackers demanded \$70 million in ransom to unlock the company's system.

Last week, US President Joe Biden discussed with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin the cyberattack. Biden said he told Putin the Washington expects Moscow to take action against

cybercriminals operating on Russian territory and the United States would do so in case the Russian government fails to act.

Kaseya was launched in 2000 in Silicon Valley, California, and offers remote management software for the information technology industry.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

US, Russia Have 'Very Constructive' Climate Proposals to Work Through - Kerry

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) - The United States and Russia have constructive climate proposals to work through and that may herald the beginning of a new effort to address the global crisis, US Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry said on Monday.

"Today, I think we have some very constructive proposals to work through. And my hope is that this can be the beginning of a new effort," Kerry said during a meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov in Moscow.

Kerry expressed hope that both countries' cooperation on climate may "open up some better opportunities on other issues."

"It's too significant, and we very much need to move together the United States as the world's second largest emitter of greenhouse gases. Russia is the fourth. And we are among that small group of nations 20 nations that are the equivalent of about 80 percent of all emissions. So what we do, what we decide to do is critical," Kerry said.

The US Special Envoy added that Russia is heavily impacted by climate change as the Arctic is melting at a rate "faster than anything we have ever measured, the fastest in the world."

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

US Pleased Putin Took Part in Climate Summit, Seeks Predictable Ties With Russia - Kerry

MOSCOW, July 12 (Sputnik) - The United States is very glad that Russian President Vladimir Putin participated in the climate summit and is seeking rational and predictable ties with Moscow, US Special Envoy for Climate John Kerry said on Monday.

"Obviously, we have some differences in the relationship between our countries but we were very pleased that President Putin took part in the summit, in the virtual summit in April," Kerry said in Moscow. "And we also share the belief that the summit in Geneva was constructive and important. And as President Biden said very clearly, we are looking for rational and predictable components of that relationship."

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

#### Death Toll in Florida Building Collapse Increases to 94 - Mayor

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) - The death toll in the condominium building collapse in Surfside, Florida, increased to 94 after four additional victims were found, Miami-Dade county Mayor Daniella Levine Cava told reporters on Monday.

"The number of confirmed deaths is now 94. Eighty-three of these victims have been identified and 80 next of kin notified," Cava said during a press briefing.

The authorities have so far been able to account 222 residents of the building but 22 individuals are still unaccounted for, Cava added.

On June 24, the 12-story Champlain Towers South residential building partially collapsed trapping the residents in the rubble. The authorities have so far not conclusively determined the cause of the collapse.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

#### US Says Destroyer Asserted Navigation Rights After Chinese Accusations of Trespassing

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) - The USS Benfold destroyer conducted a freedom of navigation operation in the South China Sea, the US Navy said on Monday after China accused the warship of trespassing.

Earlier on Monday, the Chinese military's Southern Theater Command said that guided-missile destroyer USS Benfold illegally entered the waters of the disputed Xisha islands, also known as the Paracel Islands, in the South China Sea, and was consequently warned off. Beijing protested what it says was a provocation and warned of potential consequences.

"On July 12, USS Benfold (DDG 65) asserted navigational rights and freedoms in the vicinity of the Paracel Islands, consistent with international law. This freedom of navigation operation ("FONOP") upheld the rights, freedoms, and lawful uses of the sea recognized in international law by challenging the unlawful restrictions on innocent passage imposed by China, Taiwan, and Vietnam and also by challenging China's claim to strait baselines enclosing the Paracel Islands," the US Navy said.

For decades, Beijing has been disputing the status of a number of territories in the South China Sea that it lays claim to, primarily the Paracel and Spratly Island. The Paracels, called the Xisha Islands by Beijing, are part of the dispute, as China, Taiwan and Vietnam all claim sovereignty over them.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

#### Biden Calls on Cuban Government to 'Hear Their People and Serve Their Needs' - White House



WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden on Monday expressed support for the fresh protests in Cuba and called on the government to respond to the people's demands. "We stand with the Cuban people and their clarion call for freedom and relief from the tragic grip of the pandemic and from the decades of repression and economic suffering to which they have been subjected by Cuba's authoritarian regime," Biden said in a statement shared by the White House. "The United States calls on the Cuban regime to hear their people and serve their needs at this vital moment rather than enriching themselves."

On Sunday, protests erupted in Cuba as thousands of people took to the streets to demand free elections and solutions to social problems. Local media reported that protests took place in eight cities on the island nation, including in Havana.

Biden said the Cuban people are bravely asserting their fundamental and universal rights.

"Those rights, including the right of peaceful protest and the right to freely determine their own future, must be respected," Biden said.

Earlier on Monday, Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel said some of protesters had been paid by the United States to provoke unrest in Cuba. Diaz-Canel called on his supporters the previous day to take to the streets after accusing the United States of trying to destabilize Cuba. Counter-marches of government supporters took place in five cities and Diaz-Canel joined the march in the San Antonio de los Baños municipality of Havana.

In one instance, protesters and counter-demonstrators clashed and in another a store was looted and several cars overturned, according to reports.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

#### COVID-19 Measures Contributing to Largest Increase in Hunger in Decades - UN Food Agency

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) - The coronavirus pandemic measures implemented in 2020 have been exacerbated and are now resulting in the largest increase in undernourishment and hunger in decades, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization said on Monday.

"World hunger increased in 2020 under the shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic. After remaining virtually unchanged for five years, the prevalence of undernourishment (PoU) increased from 8.4 to around 9.9 percent in just one year," the report said. "Economic downturns in 2020, including those resulting from COVID-19 containment measures, contributed to one of the largest increases in world hunger in decades, affecting almost all low- and middle-income countries.

The report found that between 720 and 811 million people in the world faced hunger in 2020, an increase of 161 million from 2019. As many as 21 percent of the population in Africa as well as 9 percent in Asia and in Latin America and the Caribbean were affected by the consequences of the pandemic measures coupled with a number of permanent causes of food insecurity.

The report concluded with an estimate that the world is not on track to meet the set goal of ending world hunger and malnutrition by 2030.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

**Biden Calls on Cuban Gov't to 'Hear Their People and Serve Their Needs' - White House**

WASHINGTON, July 12 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden on Monday expressed support for the fresh protests in Cuba and called on the government to respond to the people's demands. "We stand with the Cuban people and their clarion call for freedom and relief from the tragic grip of the pandemic and from the decades of repression and economic suffering to which they have been subjected by Cuba's authoritarian regime," Biden said in a statement shared by the White House. "The United States calls on the Cuban regime to hear their people and serve their needs at this vital moment rather than enriching themselves."

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

Cuba Protests Internal Matter, Not Likely to Be Discussed at UNSC - Russian Envoy to UN UNITED NATIONS, July 12 (Sputnik) - The ongoing protests in Cuba are an internal matter for the country and are not likely to be discussed at the UN Security Council, Russian Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations Dmitry Polyanskiy told reporters on Monday. "It is an internal matter. We usually don't discuss internal matters in the Security Council. We discuss matters related to peace and security," Polyanskiy said when asked whether the council intends to address the anti-government demonstrations in Cuba.